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Creating accountability lines for sustainable rural water services in Tanzania

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THE FUTURE OF WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
INNOVATION, ADAPTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD

**Creating accountability lines for sustainable
rural water services in Tanzania**

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BRIEFING PAPER 1184

Rural water services in Tanzania are characterised by high non-functionality, unequal distribution and little accountability. One major reason is an unsuccessful decentralisation effort. This paper describes SNV Netherlands Development Organisation's work on improving water point functionality by increasing accountability in the sector. After conducting different pilots, an intervention framework emerged that combines interventions that build the capacity of community owned water supply organisations (COWSO) to operate and manage their water services and increases claim-making powers of water users. The framework capacitates local councillors to provide oversight and introduces evidence-based planning, while capacitating local governments to regulate water services and support COWSOs. Lines of accountability and answerability between each of these actors are created throughout the interventions.

Introduction

Tanzania has a problematic water supply. It is poorly distributed in time, space, quantity and quality. The Government of Tanzania has undertaken policy reforms in the water sector, which include decentralisation, full cost recovery and an increasing role for the private sector to target these problems (Government Of Tanzania, 2009). This change in policy has been evident in the government's national water strategy and policy documents, and has been given a legal framework by the 2009 Water & Sanitation Act and Regulations. The new 'softer' water governance regime gives (rural) communities the rights to own and manage their water points, and the local government authority (LGA) the role of regulator. LGAs are responsible for guiding the decentralisation and transferring the ownership. The process of setting up Community-Owned Water Supply Organisations (COWSO) (water user entities under Tanzanian law) has been slow and the majority of districts have failed to pick up on the obligation to register. Actors at village and LGA level are unaware of the legal changes, leading to unclear roles and responsibilities and a lack of accountability mechanisms.

Recent Water Point Mappings (WPM) in 55 districts in Tanzania have shown a very high non-functionality rate and large inequalities in distribution of water points (GeoData, 2008). For non-governmental actors in the WASH sector in Tanzania, the mappings have been instrumental in developing new interventions. SNV Netherlands Development Organisation focuses on improving water point functionality and increasing equality in distribution through capacity building and targeting issues of accountability in the water sector. It has so far piloted the decentralisation process in five districts by spearheading the registration of COWSOs and strengthening these entities to be able to manage water facilities sustainably. Furthermore, looking for a comprehensive approach, SNV has capacitated councillors with trainings. In both Councillor and COWSO interventions, the water point mappings are used to introduce evidence-based planning and stimulate claim-making. What has emerged from these pilot interventions is an integrated intervention framework that guides interventions at district level and addresses accountability issues through a process approach. The major focus is on the issues of functionality and equity. This briefing describes the reasoning behind the intervention framework, the different elements of the framework and the successes and challenges that have been achieved in piloting the interventions.

Intervention framework background

The Water Point Mappings have been highly instrumental in visualising the problems in the water sector. The average non-functionality rate in the 10 districts where SNV conducted WPMs was 43%, but amongst districts non-functionality fluctuated between 18% and 83%. Furthermore, there is a large inequality in distribution within districts. In one district a single ward had 63 water points (of which 33 were operational), while three other wards had none at all (GeoData, 2008). The major inequalities have led to a more thorough study of the underlying issues.

Conducting a Power and Change Analysis of the water sector in Tanzania, Mmuya & Lemoyan (2010) found two major issues. Firstly, planning and implementation of WASH initiatives are heavily influenced by informal practices, i.e. unwritten rules, norms, expectations and political processes. The second major issue are the opposing forces of a re-centralisation process on the one hand and a ‘decentralisation by dumping’ process on the other. More specifically, key decision-making on planning, and approval for allocation and spending of resources is driven by national priorities which are determined by the central government. Local governments have little room to manoeuvre in budgeting and planning. Opposing this trend are the regulations that put operation, maintenance and ownership at the lowest possible level. District staff and community-based actors are unaware of their roles and responsibilities, and lines of accountability and answerability are left unclear.

The overarching accountability issue that emerges is that the current planning and budgeting cycle has led to high non-functionality and inequity of water point facilities, due to inadequate responsiveness to community needs. On the side of community water management, a study by WEDECO and SNV looked at the planning and management issues of water user entities and the causes of low functionality and high inequality in two districts. Major issues are a lack of (technical) training of water user entities, the notion of free water services, limited back-up support from local government and lack of financial skills (WEDECO & SNV, 2009). These findings are in line with Jones (2011) who claims that sustainability of water points depends on a combination of technical and institutional factors. The institutional factors pertain to organisation and financial management at community level, as well as a facilitating environment at LGA level. Jones discusses the importance of interventions where participation comes in the form of citizenship. Too often, he argues, water user participation ends up consisting of not more than participation as payment (for water). Instead, these interventions should seek to address the lack of active citizenship (Jones, 2011).

The intervention framework developed by SNV seeks to address both the issues at community level as well as the issues at LGA level by combining four different interventions. Firstly, information from the Water Point Mapping and legal framework is popularised for dissemination in communities. Secondly, a councillor oversight training capacitates councillors to guide and oversee local governments’ operations. The WPM results are used to put emphasis on utilising data in planning. Thirdly, communities are capacitated to manage and operate their water points by establishing and empowering Community Owned Water Supply Organisations. A fourth intervention facilitates dialogues between communities/COWSOs, councillors and LGA officials. The next sections will describe these interventions.

Popularising information for accountability

The use of Water Point Mappings has been spearheaded in Tanzania by SNV, WaterAid and Concern Worldwide. During the mappings data is collected on all water points in the district (including: source, geographic location, functionality, quality, and extraction system). This information has been disseminated in districts and at ministry levels, but districts have been slow to pick up the data for planning. Furthermore, there has been a lack of dissemination at community level. The popularisation intervention turns WPM data and information regarding laws and regulations into accessible and easy to read information for water users and councillors. Community theatre, local radio, and a local newspaper are engaged for popularisation. Each medium provokes discussions at the local level. These discussions are recorded by radio and newspaper and are used to incite further discussions and action at local government level. Overarching is the need for an attitude change: stimulating an active citizenry that makes claims and demands accountability – participation as citizenship as termed by Jones (2011). Media and data are used to drive civic action and claim making.

Training councillors

Councillor oversight is a weakness in the local accountability cycle. Councillors’ relations with both the district government as well as with citizens are weak. Councillors are ill-informed about planning and budgeting and are therefore not able to take on their task of providing oversight. Furthermore, there is too

little contact with water users, and councillors are unaware of and do not use data. Trainings focus on creating stronger linkages between councillors and water users, and stimulate the use of data in planning. The (popularised) water point mappings are used as case studies in the trainings; inequalities are highlighted and analysed. As there are high inequalities in water services between wards, and councillors are elected per ward, using data in planning creates a sense of fairness, and councillors that received training in pilot interventions are cooperating better. During the training session, councillors make a guided field visit to their ward to discuss the water situation with users, COWSOs and village government. They feed the findings of the field session back to stakeholders at the district, and are stimulated to institutionalise this process.

Empowering COWSOs

The third and most significant intervention in the framework strengthens the voice of communities in water service delivery. Communities with water points are supported to formalise their informal organisations, register with the district council as a Community Owned Water Supply Organisation, to operationalise the COWSO and to set up democratic leadership. This provides the basis for building a formal and transparent relationship with the district government, and can act as a source of claim making.

The intervention is built up in four phases: capacitate district staff, community sensitisation, registration and strengthening. The first phase builds the capacity of the District Water and Sanitation Team (DWST) – a team made up of staffs from several local government departments. The registration and support to COWSOs is a legal requirement for district councils, but currently most districts are either not working with COWSOs or are not even aware of their new role of registrar. Efforts are therefore undertaken to internalise the processes of COWSO support in the districts, and the DWST are trained to guide the entire COWSO empowerment process.

During the consecutive phases, the DWST sensitises communities using the popularised WPM, it supports the democratic election of water user committees (if these are not yet in place), and trains the committee to write a constitution. The constitution is necessary for registration and increases the confidence of committee members and creates ownership. In the final strengthening phase, communities and committees are given the tools needed to manage and maintain their water points. Trainings include: financial management, participatory planning, leadership, accountability and maintenance. A specific focus is on the creation of local accountability: too often, community committees once elected don't feel themselves accountable to their constituencies.

Creating dialogues

The final intervention aims to institutionalise dialogues between communities and local government authorities, with the process focusing on the community identifying priorities in planning and budgeting. These have to be fed up from the village government into the council and the district planning office. This process is currently obstructed in many districts, impeding accountability. This intervention has not been piloted to date and the setup of the intervention will differ in each district depending on specific needs.

Successes and challenges in the pilots

Several of the interventions have been piloted in five districts to date, and results have been highly promising. So far, 54 COWSOs have been supported, each of which has developed a constitution reflecting local context and circumstances. Communities have, after initial hesitation and requests for investments, become highly motivated and embraced the capacity building initiative. The constitutions that COWSOs wrote provided a boost to the sense of ownership over facilities, and made water users and committee members discuss issues, solutions, leadership and bylaws.

In terms of accountability, in Sengerema District where both a councillor oversight and a COWSO intervention were implemented, the interventions changed overall management of water points. At community level, registered and certified entities were set up, with a clearly outlined mandate, and with responsibilities of both users and committee members being cleared. Users are aware of their rights and are able to voice their needs with the LGA. At district level, the water department started the process of changing from provider to regulator, with a mandate to audit COWSOs and an obligation to support COWSOs. The 10 councillors that were trained in the district are cooperating better and are more aware of water issues in their own ward and in those of other councillors.

On the council side, a mixed response has been noted. Districts that were aware of the need to register COWSOs welcomed the support and were actively involved in the registration process. Here, roles and responsibilities of each actor have cleared and the interventions paved the road for district officials to upscale the registration effort. Districts that were unaware of their obligations tended to see the intervention as an outside process. Mentality amongst officials in these districts was more passive in terms of releasing funds and manpower. Sustainability in these districts is at risk. For up-scaling, support from the ministry is sought to push districts to adopt the law and to work with non-governmental stakeholders that have experience with COWSO registration.

A further issue is in financial sustainability of COWSOs. This has long been a problem for rural water groups. Trainings on finances and bookkeeping were supplied, but future interventions need a stronger focus on cost-recovery. Use of bank accounts is another risk area. COWSOs are by law obliged to open a bank account, but the distance to banks and the small amounts that are handled make bank accounts very impractical. Many communities have already used a bank account after previous interventions and most of these have not been sustained. Rather, the groups show much more enthusiasm for using local revolving funds to invest their money in. This is an issue that has to be explored further with the Water Ministry.

Conclusion

This briefing paper highlighted SNV's Water Point Functionality Intervention Framework. Born out of informality in planning and unclear roles and responsibilities in rural water services, the framework introduces lines of accountability in local planning. The framework consists of 4 interventions that target councillors, water user entities, local government authorities and water users, in order to set up relations of accountability and answerability between these actors. Pilot interventions have been able to activate citizenship and create awareness with water users while the pilots have introduced the new law in the districts' water departments. The intervention framework creates accountable councillors that are sensitive to water users' needs and make decisions based on actual data. Water departments are supported to register and strengthen COWSOs and to take on the role of registrar and regulator. Success during the pilots on the last issue has been mixed, with districts that were unaware of the legal requirement of registration showing little adoption of the processes. As the intervention framework requires high participation from district councils in terms of staff and financing, cooperation with the Water Ministry is sought to activate districts.

Keywords

Rural water supply, accountability, functionality, equity, capacity-development, Tanzania

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